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La Porte's new citizen police program deemed a success



By: Dana Guthrie

Public Safety, to a large degree, is dependent on the relationship the police share with the community they serve. Committed to this belief, the La Porte Police Department recently implemented a new Citizens on Patrol (COPs) program aimed at increasing citizen involvement in the department's public safety mission.

At the request of the La Porte Citizens Police Academy Alumni Association, the program was unanimously approved by the La Porte City Council on Jan. 9.

The La Porte Police Department immediately began recruiting, interviewing and training volunteers from among it's more than 200 Citizen Police Academy (CPA) graduates to be part of the program.

Each of the program participants were required to pass a background check and attend 8 hours of additional training, beyond that which they had already received in their previous Basic and Advanced CPA classes. As a result of this process, the first class of COPs participants included 10 members who began patrolling the streets of La Porte earlier this month.

Programs of this nature can be found throughout country and have shown to be productive, police officials said. Under La Porte's program, pairs of specially trained volunteers, operating specially marked nonemergency vehicles and armed with a police radio, assist La Porte police officers by helping in the patrol of neighborhood parks and commercial areas, reporting suspicious activity,

locating handicapped parking violations, reporting traffic hazards, identifying defective street lights, and generally providing additional sets of watchful eyes throughout the community.

Participants are not allowed to carry any weapons, but do wear specially designed polo-shirts and caps designating themselves as official COPs Program volunteers.

The first La Porte COPs patrol took place during the evening hours of March 10 and proved valuable, police said. Soon after hitting the streets, the participants observed and directed La Porte police officers to a vehicle operating erratically along the frontage road of Highway 146.

The person was stopped and subsequently charged with Driving While Intoxicated by on-duty police patrol officers. Later the COPs participants directed patrol officers to yet another suspicious vehicle, where the driver and vehicle were located in a ditch.

This suspect turned out to be wanted by local police for an official arrest warrant. Other important acts involved participants reporting an incident of illegal dumping and multiple street lights around the city in need of repair.

Chief Ken Adcox called the first night's patrol a huge success, saying "it is impossible for our police officers to be everywhere. We need our citizens to serve as eyes and ears for us and to work hand-and-hand with our police officers in order to more effectively detect and prevent crime in our neighborhoods."

La Porte Citizens Police Academy Alumni Association President Phillip Ferguson agreed with the chief's assessment. "Anything we can do to discourage criminal activity, help the city safe, and support the police department, is important to us," he said.

For more information on membership or the fundamentals of the COPS program, contact La Porte Police at 281-842-3162.